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ABSTRACT

It is suggested that a dictionary of English lexical phrases would be a valuable resource for learners of English as a Second Language. This form of collocation differs from ordinary collocations or idioms in that it is associated with particular discourse functions. In addition, most lexical phrases are in a form that allows interchangeable elements (e.g., "could/would you [verb phrase"). A scheme for categorizing lexical phrases according to function is outlined. It consists of three groups of lexical phrases: social interactions; necessary topics; and discourse devices. It is noted that in spoken and written discourse, social interactions and discourse devices are the basic pragmatic organizers and provide patterns for the discourse framework; necessary topics are introduced for pedagogical purposes. The proposed lexical phrase dictionary would list phrases in two sections. For comprehension, phrases would be listed by form, alphabetized by the first fixed word. For production, phrases would be listed by function, as subcategories of social interactions, necessary topics, and discourse devices. Phrases would be further identified by the amount of variation they permit: none, limited by constraints not found in the grammar, or allowing variation. (MSE)

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A LEXICAL PHRASE DICTIONARY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Current dictionaries show form, grammatical function and reference of individual words, but only in special instances, as with phrasal verbs and particular idioms, are the co-occurring words (collocations) considered at all. But a word is also defined by the words it occurs with (see for example Sinclair 1987) as well as its meaning in isolation. In collocations like `rancid butter' and `false tooth', one word adds more to the meaning of the other than vice versa; `tooth' gets more of its meaning from `false' than `false' gets from `tooth'.

We propose a particular kind of collocation as especially crucial for language learners' dictionaries and vocabulary lessons. Research has shown that Lexical Phrases are important units of written and spoken discourse (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992), yet at present learners' dictionaries and vocabulary lessons do not list most of the basic, commonly occurring ones.

Lexical Phrases

As described in Nattinger and DeCarrico, Lexical Phrases are collocations, or `chunks' of language of varying length, conventionalized structures that occur more frequently and have

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more idiomatically determined meaning than language that is put together each time, and several researchers, such as Hakuta (1974), Wong-Fillmore (1976), Peters (1983), now put Lexical Phrases and other prefabricated language at the center of work in both first and second language acquisition.

However, although Lexical Phrases are types of collocations, they are different from ordinary collocations or idioms in that Lexical Phrases are associated with particular discourse functions. These differences are illustrated in (1-3) below.

(1) Collocations: sets of words that tend to occur together; we say `rancid butter' and `sour cream', for instance, but we don't say `sour butter' or `rancid cream'.

(2) Idioms: language chunks that have idiomatic meanings, such as `kick the bucket' or `hell bent for leather'.

(3) Lexical Phrases: conventionalized language chunks that have more or less idiomatic meanings, but they also have associated discourse functions: `by the way' is used to shift a topic in discourse; `I'm sorry to hear that X' is used to express sympathy; the indirect speech act, `could/would you X', is used to make requests; and `the catch/ problem/ difficulty (here) is that X' is used to qualify previous information'.

Another important aspect of Lexical Phrases is that, while some of them, such as `by the way' or `on the other hand' are set phrases allowing no variability, the majority are more like skeletal frames that have slots for various fillers. An example is `Could/would you X?', where either `could' or `would' can be chosen, and `X' is a slot that is filled with a VP, such as

`Could pass the salt?' These phrases include short, relatively fixed ones, such as `a ___ ago', or longer phrases or clauses such as `I'm (very) sorry to hear that X', where `X' is a slot that can be filled with an embedded sentence. Some have syntactic frames with more than one slot, such as `the catch/ problem/ difficulty (here) is that X', with the first slot is filled with nouns such as `catch', `problem', `difficulty', and the second with an embedded sentence. Some also allow a bit more flexibility in choice of fillers for slots. For example, `the ___ er X, the ___ er Y' allows either a noun phrase or a sentence in the slots for `X' and `Y'. Examples of these variations are shown in (4).

(4) a. a ___ ago; a year ago, a month ago, along time ago

b. I'm (very) sorry to hear that X: I'm very sorry to hear that your father is ill; I'm sorry to hear that you lost the race.

c. the catch/ problem/ difficulty (here) is that X: the catch here is that this theory is now considered questionable.

d. the ___ er X, the ___ er Y: the higher the climb, the the thinner the air; the longer you wait, the sleepier you get.

Lexical Phrase Categories

What follows is an attempt to group lexical phrases according to function in a way that will reflect the requirements of spoken and written language, be pedagogically useful, and at the same time provide mnemonically appropriate categories for a

learners' dictionary. These groups are not traditional grammar categories by any means, ncr are they semantic ones; instead, they represent various categories of meaning and pragmatic characteristics of discourse and conversational structure that exist in many different types of situations. They are somewhat similar to Wilkins' notional-functional categories, where emphasis is on the lexicon needed to perform specific speech functions for common situations (Wilkins 1976). We emphasize that ours are intended to be pedagogical as well as theoretical categories, devised to use as practical instruments for the classroom, but also, we feel, adhering closely to current work in discourse analysis and speech act theory.

We refer to these groups as `social interactions', `necessary topics', and `discourse devices'. Under social interactions we list lexical phrases that are markers describing social relations. Necessary topics are those topics about which learners will be asked, or ones they will need to talk about frequently. The third group, discourse devices, are types of lexical phrases that connect the meaning and structure of the discourse. In what follows, we give examples each type, together with illustrations of typical lexical phrases used to perform these specific functions.

Social Interactions: Social interactional markers, those that describe social relations, consist of (a) categories of conversational maintenance, and (b) categories of functional meaning relating to conversational purpose.

(a) *Conversational Maintenance* (regularities of conversational interaction that describe how conversations begin, continue and end.)

Summoning: Excuse/pardon me (sustained intonation); Hey/hi/hello, (Name); How are you (doing)? Lookit; I didn't catch/get your name; Do you live around here? Hello, I'm + NAME; Good morning/afternoon/evening, (how are you?) What's up?

Responding to summons: Hi/hello, (Name); How are you (doing)? What's going on/ happening? Hello, I'm + NAME; (I'm) fine, thanks, (and you)?

Nominating a topic: What's X? (By the way) Do you know/remember X? Have you heard about X?

Clarifying: (1) audience: (I) beg your pardon? Excuse/pardon me? What did you mean by X/when you said X?

(2) speaker: What I mean/I'm trying to say is X; How shall I put it ? Let me repeat;

Checking comprehension: All right? (Do you) understand (me)?

Shifting a topic: Say, by the way; This is (a bit) off the subject/track, but X; Where were we/was I ? Oh that reminds me of X;

Shifting turns: (Well), so O.K., (Look/listen), excuse/pardon me; Could I say something here?

Closing: Well, that's about it; I must be going; (It's been) nice talking to you/meeting you; I've got to run/go/do X; I mustn't keep you any longer;

Parting: Goodbye; See you later; (Well) so long (for now);

(b) *Conversational Purpose* (types of Speech Acts, i.e. functions that describe the purposes for which conversations take place.)

Expressing politeness: Thanks (very much); If you don't mind;

Questioning: (rising intonation) Do you X? Is/are there/it/they X?

Answering: Yes, (there/it/they is/are) (X); No, (there/it they is/are not) (X).

Requesting: Modal Verb + Pro + VP (i.e., Would you (mind) X?); May I X?

Offering: Modal Verb + Pro + VP (i.e., May/Can I help (you)?) Would you like X?

Complying: Of course; Sure thing; I'd be happy/glad to.

Refusing: Of course not; No way; I'd rather you X; I'm sorry but (I'm afraid/I think that) X;

Complimenting: NP + be/look + (intensifier) + ADJ; I + (intensifier) + like/love + NP.

Asserting: It is (a fact/the case that) X; I think/believe that X; It's said that X; Word has it that X; It seems X; I read (somewhere) that X; There is/are/was/were X;

Responding: (1) acknowledging (simple reinforcers): (Yeah) uh huh; (And then) what happened (next/then/after that)?

(2) accepting: Yeah, I know; (OK), right; Oh, I see; No kidding;

(3) endorsing: Yes, that's so/correct/right; I absolutely/certainly/completely agree; (That's) a (very) good/excellent point; <u>There</u> you go; That's great;

(4) disagreeing: Yes, but (I think that) X; Well, (sustained intonation), no; I don't (really) agree (with you/X);

Expressing gratitude: Thanks very much/a lot (for X); I (really) appreciate your thoughtfulness/kindness/doing X;

Expressing sympathy: I'm (very) sorry about/to hear (about) X; (Wow,) that's/how terrible/awful; What a shame/pity/terrible thing;

Necessary Topics: These lexical phrases mark topics about which learners are often asked, or ones that are necessary in daily conversations.

Autobiography: My name is ____, I'm from ____, I'm (a) ____ (years old);

Language: Do you speak ____? How do you say/spell ____? I don't speak ____ very well; I speak ____ (a little);

Quantity: How much/big is ____? (Not) a great deal; Lots of ____.

Time: When is X? What time X? For a long time/____ years; (a) ____ ago; Since X; At/it's ____ o'clock; On ____day; The ____ before/after ____;

Location: Where is ____? What part of the ____? Across from ____; Next to ____; To the right/left (of ____); How far is ____? ____ blocks (from ____).

Weather: Is it going to X? It's (very) ____ (today)! I'm ____;

Likes: I like/enjoy ____ (a lot); I don't like/enjoy ____ (at all); I'd like to X; ____ is lots of fun; (What) do you like to X?

Food: I'd like (to have) ____/to make a reservation (for ____); The check; A table for ____; Serve breakfast/lunch/dinner;

Shopping: How much is ____? I want to buy/see ____; It (doesn't) fit(s); (Not) too expensive; A (really) good/bad buy/bargain; ____ cost(s) (me/you/them)___dollars;

Discourse Devices (lexical phrases that connect the meaning and structure of the discourse).

Logical Connectors: Therefore; As a result (of X); Nevertheless; Because (of) X; In spite of X;

Temporal Connectors: The day/week/month/year before/after ____; And then; After X then/the next is Y;

Spatial Connectors: Around here; Over there; At/on the corner;

Fluency Devices: You know; It seems (to me) that X; I think that X; By and large; At any rate; If you see what I mean; And so on; So to speak; As a matter of fact;

Exemplifiers: In other words; It's like X; For example; To give you an example;

Relators: The (other) thing X is Y; X has (a lot)/doesn't have (much) to do with Y; Not only X but also Y;

Qualifiers: It depends on X; The catch is; It's only in X that Y;

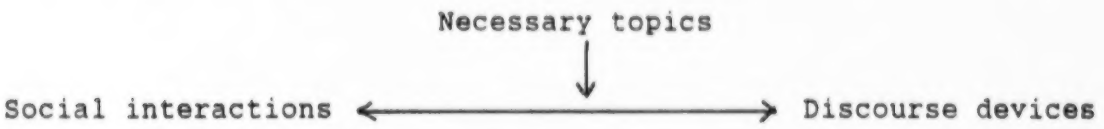
Evaluators: As far as I know/can tell; Frankly (speaking); There's no doubt that X; (I'm (not) absolutely/pretty sure/positive/certain but) I think that X; I guess; At least;

Summarizers: To make a long story short; My point (here) is that X; OK, so (level intonation);

Lexical Phrases in Discourse

In spoken and written discourse, social interactions and discourse devices are the basic pragmatic organizers and provide patterns for the framework of the discourse; necessary topics, introduced basically for their pedagogical usefulness, provide

patterns for the subject of discussion. A diagrammatic representation of this relationship might be given as follows:



Most conversational encounters, for example, if they are not of the briefest, phatic sort, are composed of a patchwork of patterns from all three of these categories. One of the most basic interactions at the beginning of a conversation is to get the attention of the person one is talking to. When that person responds to the summons, the next step is to get the partner to attend to the topic of discourse; one then begins to offer information about the selected topic. In this way the participants cooperate to build a conversation. After the purpose of the conversation has been satisfied, the participants close the dialogue, and part.

The following is a relatively simple, reconstructed dialogue which illustrates some typical lexical phrase functions in conversation (with labeled lexical phrases), including their interconnected functions:

A: Hey, Sally. What's up? (summons:SI)

B: Hi, Bill. How are you doing? (response:SI)

A: Pretty well, thanks. (response:SI) By the way (topic shift:SI), did you hear about my new car? (topic nomination:SI)

B: No kidding (response:SI), a new car? (clarification:SI)

A: Uh huh (response:SI). I bought an old Volvo (shopping:NT) the day before yesterday. (time:NT)

B: Hey, that's great (response:SI). How much did it cost you? (shopping:NT)

A: It seems to me that it was a really good buy (assertion:SI) (evaluator:DD) (fluency device:DD) (shopping:NT), and what's more, (conjunction:DD) there isn't anything wrong with it (assertion:SI)--as far as I can tell (evaluator:DD), at any rate (fluency device:DD)

B: Yeah, it's a beauty (response:SI); you were lucky to find it (assertion:SI). Oh, guess what (topic shift:SI)? Word has it that Jack just got a big promotion (assertion:SI). Did you hear about it (question:SI)?

A: Yes, I heard (answer:SI). The other thing I heard is that he gets to move into a fancy big office (relation:DD) on the top floor (location:NT).

B: No kidding, that's great (response:SI). Well, I've got to run now (closing:SI). See you later (parting:SI).

A: Well, then (closing:SI), so long for now (parting:SI).

Person A initiates the conversation by summoning the attention of B with the lexical phrases `Hey, NAME' and `What's up?' B responds to the summons, and after A responds to B, A

then shifts the topic (By the way) and nominates a new topic (Did you hear about X?), and so on.

A's remark beginning with `it seems to me that X' is typical of the complex utterances that often occur after a topic has been established and information is being presented about it. Evaluators, fluency devices and other discourse devices begin to play a part in the evolving conversation. Moreover, the lexical phrases themselves begin to serve several purposes simultaneously. For example, the beginning of A's utterance, `it seems to me that X', bears a multiple function: it marks a social interaction, for it is a routinized way of making an assertion, and at the same time it serves as a couple of discourse devices--as an `evaluator', because it marks the assertion as personal opinion, and as a `fluency device', because it is a bigger piece stitched into the discourse than the similar phrase, `it was X'. Being a bigger chunk, it gives the speaker more time to plan for the next routine, and thus promotes fluency.

In form, it is an expansion of the lexical phrase `I'm (not) (absolutely/ pretty) sure/ positive/ certain (but I think) (that) X', and certainly allows A more time to gather thoughts than would a minimal form of the same lexical phrase, such as `I think X', or simply the bald assertion, `it is X'.

A Lexical Phrase Dictionary

A learners' dictionary should draw a clear distinction between comprehension and production, for these seem to be very different skills. Comprehension relies on strategies that permit one to understand words and store them, to commit them to memory, that is, while production concerns strategies that activate one's storage by retrieving these words from memory and by using them in appropriate situations. To accommodate these skills, a lexical phrase dictionary will therefore list phrases in two sections. For comprehension, lexical phrases will be listed by form, alphabetized by the first fixed word in the frame. For production, phrases will be listed by their functions, as various subcategories of Social Interactions, Necessary Topics and Discourse Devices.

Phrases in both sections will then be further identified as one of three kinds according to the amount of variability they permit:

1. Set phrases (by the way, on the other hand)
   Entry: (a) enter entire phrase as is, (b) together with its discourse function (signal a shift of topic, signal contrast with previous information).

2. Frames that allow limited variation (a ___ ago; the ___ er X, the ___ er Y), with constraints not found in the grammar
   Entry: (a) enter frame with slot, (b) discourse function (time marker, comparison marker), (c) stipulate what can go in the slot

   Example: `a ___ ago', need to stipulate that the slot can only be filled with a time NP

   (Note: although the grammar already stipulates that a NP would follow the article, it is necessary to indicate that only a time NP can occur in this frame)

   Example: ``the ___ er X, the ___ er Y', need to stipulate that the slot must be filled with an adjective, and the X and Y by either an NP or a finite sentence

3. Frames that allow variation (the catch/ problem/ difficulty (here) is that X; it's only in X that Y), but because this allowable variation is already stipulated by the rules of the grammar, these entries can be greatly simplified by eliminating it
   Entry: (a) enter frame with slots, (b) discourse function (qualifier)

(Note: this would be in a dictionary intended for more advanced learners; for beginning or intermediate learners, it might be better to include the grammatical information)

Example: `the catch/ problem/ difficulty is that X' need only include the discourse function, for (a) the choice of NP is included in the frame, and (b) because `X' follows the complementizer `that', the grammar already stipulates that an embedded sentence must follow, and further, that the embedded sentence must be finite

Example: `it's only in X that Y' need only include the the discourse function, because (a) `X' follows a preposition and Y follows the complementizer `that', and (b) the grammar already stipulates that only an NP or gerund phrase can follow a preposition, and that only a finite embedded sentence can follow the complementizer `that' (i.e. `it's only in (NP) Venice that (S) you find gondolas', or `it's only in (Gerund) running uphill that (S) I get out of breath')

Footnote

1. It is not unusual that a single lexical phrase should have multiple functions. Speech Act theory has also had to allow for the fact that many categories cannot be defined as non-arbitrary and discrete types.

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